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A Collaboration of Mystic Trends: The Concept of Soul and Love in Platonism and Sufism

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Abstract

The concepts of soul and love have extended roots that date back to the history of mankind. This paper is an endeavor to collaborate two parallel concepts that approached the subject of love and soul from different worldviews: philosophical rationalism verses theological mysticism. In Plato, we find a rational study of metaphysics; while in Islamic mysticism (Sufism), we find an intuitive insight to metaphysics. Yet these parallels reached the same conclusion that love beholds a sacred power that can transform and purify self to seek knowledge or union with the Divine. The purpose of this paper is neither to depict errors or truth nor produce critique about these altering views; but to maintain a foundational belief for the existence of soul and love which were often rendered as meaningless, pseudo and irrational in contemporary thought. Although the nature of these concepts is complex, yet there is a high probability of their existence whether we name it as soul, essence, élan vital, etc. Through comparative analysis of both worldviews, we can prove that soul and love exists even from a rational perspective. The study will start with discussing the historical evidence of mystic trends across religions and cultures; and the origin of the concept of soul. In later sections, our study's prime focus would be on the concept of soul and love in Platonism and Sufism respectively.

Keywords: Platonism, Sufism, Soul (*psyche/ruh*), Love (*Eros/ishq*), Spiritual Knowledge

Introduction

Mysticism is the subjective experience of a Higher Reality that can be attainable through love, silence contemplation and intuition. This intuitive experience is directly connected with the concept of Soul (immaterial). Since physical body will perish but there is a general consensus among religions and cultures that the soul will not; hence mystics strongly believes that it is soul that can be united with God or Higher Reality. In both Platonism and Islamic mysticism, this reunion can be paved by crossing stages of love. Therefore, love is considered as a path or bridge that connects soul to Ultimate Reality. In the following section, we will study the origin of mysticism that had prevailed among different religions and cultures. Then we will analyze concept of Soul particular within Platonism and Sufism respectively. In last two sections, we will study both worldviews through comparative analysis followed by conclusive remarks.

1.1. The Origin of Mysticism

The origin of the word 'mysticism' roots back to a Greek word μύω (myō) that means to conceal a secret or mystery and μυστικοσ is a person who has been initiated.[1]

> Mysticism is the pursuit of communion with, identity with, or conscious awareness of an ultimate reality, divinity, spiritual truth, or God through direct experience, intuition, instinct or insight. Mysticism usually centers on practices intended to nurture those experiences. Mysticism may be dualistic, maintaining a distinction between the self and the divine, or may be non-dualistic.[2]

To define it briefly, mysticism is a subjective and intuitive experience that transcends one's ego and the material world to seek communion with the Divine or God. The former definition as well as platonic concept of justice leads adeptly to soul and love, i.e. the basic theme of my paper. We could summarize it that the Platonic Good and justice in addition to mysticism, directs us towards a rational insight and inwardness which becomes conscious in our soul. The path of this awareness summon love to meet its destiny.

Although, mysticism is a vast concept that is present in almost all the religious and irreligious cultures, however it is difficult to discern the exact timeline of its origin.[3] Moreover, mysticism is often termed as 'religious romanticism'; it is present in every culture and religion with different methods and diverse terminologies. But we have dived into the origin and global development of mystic trends among religions and cultures in the following table.

Table 1. Origin of Mystic trends in different religions and Cultures

Types	Timeline of the Movements	Concepts
Prehistoric Roots	Shamanic traditions 20,000 BCE;	They tend to seek altered states to commune with spirits through trance, dance, or vision quests.
	Ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian (4300-3000 BCE); and ancient Hindu traditions like Vedic period (1500-500 BCE)	The timeline of these earliest civilizations overlap. They are considered to be one of the earliest civilizations to practice mystical symbols like sacred geometry, initiatory rites and meditation.
Greek Mysticism	Pre-Socratic and Hellenistic era[4]; Platonic mysticism (4th century BCE)	Plato's idea of Love paves a way to attain a higher Reality in his World of Ideas.

[1]Harper, Douglas, *Dictionary of Etymology* (2001), http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=mystic (accessed november 23, 2013).

[2]W. F. Cobb, *Mysticism and the Creed* (Literary Licensing, LLC, 2014).

[3]This table is a rough sketch where people can seek more about mysticism from various other perspectives. However, due to the immense diversity of mystic trends I narrowed down my area to Muslim mysticism only.

[4]There are numerous Philosophers in the Pre-Socratic era with different world-views regarding mysticism. Covering each one of them would be beyond the scope of this paper. However, interested readers can refer to Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*. (Touchstone, 2008).

Types	Timeline of the Movements	Concepts
Christian mysticism	Neoplatonism (3rd century CE)	It upholds that the soul is in continuous struggle to attain the union with the One (God)[5]. Plotinus, Proclus and Damascius are prominent Neoplatonist.
	Desert Fathers and Mothers (3rd–5th century CE)	They were the early Christian hermits and ascetics who isolated themselves from the world in order to gain experience of God.[6] Paul of Thebes, Alexander the Great are desert fathers.
	Mystical theologians	Emphasized union with Christ, the dark night of the soul, and inner contemplation[7]
Jewish mysticism	*Merkava* mysticism (1st [Palestine];7th-11th centuries CE [Babylonia])	The term means 'Chariot or throne of God' in Ezekiel's vision of the divine chariot[8] This mysticism was strongly influenced by gnostic beliefs.[9]
	Kabbalah (12th-16th centuries)	Reinterpreting Torah in its spiritual essence. The ascetics' prime focus is on the *Sefirot* (attributes of God) and union with the *Ein Sof* (Infinite)
	Hasidism (12th-13th century)	*Hasid* means the pious one. This movement gain popularity in Germany that emphasized on the

[5]Neoplatonism has influenced Christian and Islamic mysticism. Edward Moore, "Neo-Platonism," In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2022, https://iep.utm.edu/neoplato/

[6]It influenced later monastic traditions, including Western monasticism and the Hesychast movement in the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Hesychast movement emphasized interior silence and an uninterrupted Prayer of Jesus as a means of achieving union with God. (See Melissa Petruzzello, "Hesychasm: Eastern Orthodoxy," s.v. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (2023), https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hesychasm

[7]Some of the famous Christian mystics are: Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), John of the Cross (1542-1591), Julian of Norwich (1343-1416), Meister Eckhart (d. 1328), and Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), St. Francis of Assisi (d.1226), Hadewijch of Antwerp, and Catherine of Siena (1347-1380). See (Carter H. Lindberg, and Linwood Fredericksen, et.al., "Christianity," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1999, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity/Eastern-Christianity#ref301436).

[8]Michael Ray, "Merkava: Kabbalah, Chariot Vision and Divine Presence," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2023), https://www.britannica.com/topic/Merkava-Jewish-mysticism

[9]Michael Ray, "Merkava: Kabbalah, Chariot Vision and Divine Presence."

Types	Timeline of the Movements	Concepts
		importance of personal spiritual life rather than formal ritualism.[10]
Islamic mysticism	Sufism (8th Century)	Chief components of Islamic mysticism are: *ishq*, *fana* and *baqa.*[11] There are different Sufi orders that formed structured paths such as Suharwardi, Naqshbandi, Chishti, Mevlevi, and Qadiri etc.[12] Eminent Sufi's are Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, Al-Hallaj, Ibn Arabi, Jalal-ud-din Rumi.
Hindu mysticism	Upanishads (800–300 BCE);	Hindu mysticism focusing on the realization of Brahman (Ultimate Reality) and *Atman* (Soul) as one.
	Bhakti Movement (6th-17th Century)	Its prime focus is to devote oneself to *Bhagvan* (God).[13] Other concepts that revolve around spiritual awakening includes: *Moksha*, *bhakti*, *yoga* and *Vedanta*.
Buddhist mysticism	Zen and Tibetan Vajrayana traditions	Nirvana and inner emptiness (*shunyata*)[14]
Unitarian universalism		Transcendentalism
Taoism	Chinese traditions	Their Prime focus is on *wu wei* (effortless action), harmony with the Tao; and to attain immortality through spiritual cultivation.[15]
Contemporary mysticism	Universalist mysticism (19th-20th century)	William James and Aldous Huxley explore mystic trends that are not confined within religious boundaries.

[10]"Ḥasidism: Medieval Jewish Religious Movement," In *Encyclopedia Britannica,* (2023), https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hasidism-medieval-Jewish-religious-movement

[11]A detailed account of Sufism will be given in the third and fourth sections.

[12]A. J. Arberry, *Sufism*: *An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (Routledge, 1950).

[13]It prime focus is to serve Hindu Gods such as Hanuman, Krishna, Brahma, Vishnu etc.

[14]Donald Lopez, "Nirvana: Religion," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 2014. https://www.britannica.com/topic/nirvana-religion

[15]Taoism is also known as Daoism. See Dan Merkur, "Mysticism - Daoism, Chinese, Philosophy," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* (2025), https://www.britannica.com/topic/mysticism/Daoist-traditions

Types	Timeline of the Movements	Concepts
Scientific Mysticism	Neo-mysticism	It is a modernized version that is not restricted to any religion. It incorporates meditation, energy healing, and global spiritual practices that is more relevant in contemporary world.
	Psychological approaches	Exploring para-psychology in Jungian psychology and transpersonal psychology.
	Mystic Trends in Modern science	Quantum physics and neuroscience begin exploring parallels with mystical insights.[16]

One can easily delineate that in every religion, culture and tradition, mysticism is nothing but a universal human impulse to seek a personal experience of the Divine. They share common themes of Union with God; subjectivity of mystical experiences; self-annihilation, purification or rebirth of the soul; love and longing. The expressions and practices may vary among them, but a certain overlapping can be witnessed as well, for instance poetic and symbolic expressions, trance and dances, mediation and prayers; or even philosophical understanding to transcend from this material world and seek knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. However, in here, to narrow down my area I would collaborate Islamic mysticism (or Sufism), since it is often considered that Muslim metaphysics is influenced by Greeks, specifically Neo-Platonism.[17]

Before we approach the concept of soul and love I would like to reminisce that these concepts were not initiated by Plato rather they existed much earlier before him. There exists some form of concept regarding soul and how it is eternal and can survive death. These views can be extracted from prehistoric and indigenous beliefs (animism, Shamanism) to Ancient civilizations (Egypt[18], Mesopotamian[19] and Greek); from polytheistic religions (Hinduism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism) to monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). In order to comprehend life, identity, morality and after-life, the concept of soul, remains the central point in religious, scientific and philosophical debates.

According to Homer,

> (1) The belief in soul is not to be taken as controversial; it is as obvious that human beings have soul as it is that they are alive. (2) The soul is the principle of life; it marks the difference between living and the non-living. (3) The soul is closely connected to the person whose soul it is. When

[16]Gopal C. Bhar, "Understanding Mysticism through Quantum Physics," *Prabuddha Bharata or Awakened India*. 123, no. 3 (2018): 347-365.

[17]John Bussanich, and Majid Fakhry, "Philosophy, Dogma and the Impact of Greek Thought in Islam," *Philosophy East and West* 47 (2), (1997): 282. https://doi.org/10.2307/1399884.

[18]For Egyptians, soul has three parts: *Ka* (vital force), *Ba* (personality), *Akh* (immortal form), Soul is created by gods; and through leading a moral life and proper mummification it can be reunited with the divine.

[19]For Mesopotamians, soul (*etemmu*) went to underworld after death. It survives in its weakest form in the afterlife.

> Odysseus addresses the soul of Achilles of Hades, he calls it 'Achilles' and it carries the memories and attitudes of Achilles. (4) Though a belief in souls is not necessarily a belief in anything immortal, belief in an after-life is naturally expressed as a belief in the survival of souls after death. Since the soul is the bearer of life and personality, it is the appropriate bearer of immortality.[20]

This very concept of soul enables philosophers from Thales to Plato, to seek the essence that is present in everything that exists, continued to this day.[21] Due to limited scope of this paper, we cannot give a detailed account as to how concept of soul develops or evolved in different cultures and religions across time. We shall, however, discuss Platonic and Islamic concept of Soul.

2. A Parallel Trends of Platonic and Islamic Concept of Soul

The holy Qur'an mentions of *rūh* (soul) on twenty-one occasions: "They ask you ˹O Prophet˺ about the spirit. Say, 'Its nature is known only to my Lord, and you ˹O humanity˺ have been given but little knowledge.'"[22]

In another verse: "So when I have fashioned him and had a spirit of My Own ˹creation˺ breathed into him, fall down in prostration to him."[23]

These verses depict that soul is breathed unto humans by Allah; and it will survive death however, mankind have limited knowledge of it. The Sufi teachings revolve around the Qur'ān and prophetic teachings. Hence, they uphold similar views regarding soul. Perhaps due to this spiritual connectivity, they believe that reunion with Allah is possible through spiritual awakening.[24] It is to ne noted that existence of soul doesn't make it eternal just because it survives death.[25]

In similar vein, for Plato a change from visible to intelligible realm was akin to Heraclitus state of flux, i.e. tension and strife is essential for the existence of things and God is imminent in all things, binding them to unity and determining transition of the cosmos to that law.[26] Parmenides is another influence that is prominent in Plato's idea of Being and Becoming.[27] To him, being is the One 'it is' while becoming is a change 'it cannot be.'[28] Hence Plurality is an illusion. By

[20]Terence Irwin, *Classical Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 97.

[21]Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (Touchstone, 2008).

[22]Bani Israeil/Isra17:85.

[23]al-Hijr 15:29.

[24]Yusuf Dalhat, "The Concept of *Al-ruh* (Soul) in Islam," *International Journal of Education and Research* 3 (8), (2015): 431-440, https://www.ijern.com/journal/2015/August-2015/35.pdf.

[25]Yusuf Dalhat, "The Concept of *Al-ruh* (Soul) in Islam," 439.

[26]For Heraclitus, the essence of all things is 'Fire,' for it feeds, consume and transform itself into a heterogeneous matter. Springing from multitude of objects, it changes them into itself, without this supply of material it would die and cease to exist. See Heraclitus, *Heraclitus, Fragments: A Text and Translation with a Commentary*, T. M. Robinson, (commentary), translated by S. D. Sullivan, (University of Toronto Press, 1987), https://doi.org/10.2307/1088761; Daniel W. Graham, "Does Nature Love to Hide? Heraclitus B123 DK," *Classical Philology* 98 (2), (2003): 175, https://doi.org/10.2307/1215500.

[27]J. Tate, "Plato and Parmenides - Francis Macdonald Cornford: Plato and Parmenides. Parmenides' Way of Truth and Plato's Parmenides Translated with an Introduction and a Running Commentary. Pp. Xvii+251. London: Kegan Paul, 1939. Cloth, 12s. 6d. Net" Book Review, *The Classical Review* 55 (2), (1941): 76–78. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0009840x00310162.

[28]See John E. Sisko, "Anaxagoras Betwixt Parmenides and Plato," *Philosophy Compass* 5 (6), (2010): 432–42. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2010.00300.x

declining transition, he is in turn refuting sense perceptions.[29] This is where he distinguished between a way of truth and a way of opinion which Plato likely differentiated as Knowledge and Opinion.[30] Thus Plato synthesized Heraclitus notion of flux and Parmenides distinction of reason and sense experience in his metaphysics and epistemology

According to Plato's 'tripartite theory' of Soul, the soul is eternal and comprised of three parts: Rational, Spirited and Appetitive part.[31] While the rational part of the soul is inclined towards truth; the spirited and appetitive part are inclined towards honor and worldly desires. Thus he stressed on the rational part in order to attain knowledge of 'the Good' which is only present in a philosopher.[32] For this he described two stages of 'Being' and 'Becoming' in 'allegory of the cave'.[33] Soul belongs to the world of Forms and can be returned through the pursuit of philosophical knowledge and virtue.[34]

	METAPHYSICS	EPISTEMOLOGY
BEING	Higher forms	A: Understanding
BEING	Lower forms Example: form human	B: Reasoning
BECOMING	Sensible objects Example: mother Teresa	C: Perception
BECOMING	Images E.g.: mother Teresa's reputation	D: Imagination

Figure 1. Plato's Allegory of the Cave

[29]Daniel W. Graham, "The Legacy of Parmenides." *Ancient Philosophy* 18 (2), (1998): 435–39. https://doi.org/10.5840/ancientphil199818237.

[30]The nature of Parmenides being was not ideal like Plato. It was material and finite, definite, determinate and complete. He was a monistic materialist who asserted that matter is indestructible but unlike Democritus negated the experience of senses. See Sisko, "Anaxagoras Betwixt Parmenides and Plato," 432–42. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2010.00300.x, However, Melissus a disciple of Parmenides rejected a materialistic and finite notion of the One, since if it is finite it is bound by nothing. Hence it must be infinite because there cannot be a void outside the Being. Also See (Falvia Marcacci, Flavia, "Argumentation and Counterfactual Reasoning in Parmenides and Melissus," *Revista Archai*, no. 30 (May 2020): e03004. https://doi.org/10.14195/1984-249x_30_4.

[31]Christopher Shields, "Plato's Divided Soul," in *Ockham on Emotions in the Divided Soul*, eds., Dominik Perler and Klaus Corcilius. (De Gruyter, 2014), 15-38, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110311884.15.

[32]Unlike Aristotle, Plato's concept of Soul is scattered throughout his thought; and there is no specified investigation on nature of the Soul. [See Eric J. Roberts, "Plato's View of the Soul," *Mind* 14 (55), (1905): 371–89. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2248426].

[33]Douglas J. Scott, *Archetypes of Wisdom* (Wadsworth, 2001); and Georgia Mouroutsou, "The Allegory of the Cave: The Necessity of the Philosopher's Descent," *Plato Journal*, no. 11 (2011): https://doi.org/10.14195/2183-4105_11_4.

[34]Eric J. Roberts, "Plato's View of the Soul," 371–89.

The above chart represents varying levels of truth and reality. In his dialogue between Socrates and priestess, Diotima, teaches that love evolve in stages (also known as 'ladder of love.'[35] Likewise the tradition of Sufi used *Maqamat* (stages) and *ahwal* (states) in order to initiate a person, so that he could form a communion with Almighty.[36] The disciple constantly strives against his carnal urges. The Sufi stations are *zuhd* (renunciation), *hubb* (Divine love), *taqwa* (piety), *shukr* (gratitude), *sabr* (patience) and *rida* (contentment with Allah's decree).[37] These *Maqamat* are associated with *ahwāl* which are essential for *fana* (annihilation of personality) and to form a communion with Almighty.[38] The journey of Sufi can have one of these three ways: *Maghfirat* (absolution of soul); *Mohabbat* (love through pain and sacrifice); and *Ma'rifat* (from intuition to illumination).[39]

In Platonic thought, a philosopher is the lover of the truth or wisdom; and a healthy soul depicts that the rational part of the soul dominate.[40] On the other hand, Muslim mystics apprehend religion as a fruit while 'real truth' is its seed. Thus searching that seed is the ultimate goal of a Sufi.[41] To attain ecstatic states, mystics developed techniques of *Zikr* (remembrance) and *Sama* (listening).[42] These techniques possess social function, enabling to unite the people in spiritual brotherhood.[43] Likewise, in spite of being controversial, the underlying idea to Platonic concept of common sharing on a city level is to unite the city as a family, so that their loyalties wouldn't be solely inclined towards their own relatives and parents.[44]

Apart from love, another essential character of soul is harmony in platonic thought.[45] He tends to harmonized forms of the Good to make them the most ordered things that are possibly conceivable.[46] Similarly, Sufis relates to the order of the world as mentioned in the Qur'ān.[47] As to him the real happiness is only attainable when soul and body are harmonized. Once the knowledge of the forms of the Good illuminates all understandings it becomes holistic in nature.[48] It is then that Plato's enlightened man returns back to the cave to educate the prisoners. On the

[35][1. Physical Attraction] Love starts with physical attraction but later, [2. Attraction to All Bodies] the lover acknowledges that there is beauty in all form of bodies. [3. Love of Beautiful Souls] the focus then shifts to inner virtues and moral character. [4. Love of Laws and Institutions] Lover then began to admire everything that constitutes those virtues (be it institutions or social laws and practices). [5. Love of Knowledge and Wisdom] In the next stage he desired to comprehend the nature of beauty and truth itself. [6. Love of the Form of Beauty] At last, he attains Highest form of love that is perfect, unchangeable and eternal. See Plato, *Symposium*, Trans., Benardete (Athens, 385–380 BC); Kristian Urstad, "Loving Socrates: The Individual and the Ladder of Love in Plato's Symposium," *Res Cogitans* 1, no. 7 (2010): 33-47].

[36]Abdul Wachid Bambang Suharto, "The Concept of Love and the Basis of Its Doctrines between *Maqamat* and *Haal*," *Lensa: Kajian Kebahasaan, Kesusastraan, Dan Budaya* 11 (1), (2021): 42. https://doi.org/10.26714/lensa.11.1.2021.42-53.

[37]Arberry, *Sufism*: *An Account of the Mystics of Islam.*

[38]Bambang Suharto, "The Concept of Love and the Basis of Its Doctrines between *Maqamat* and *Haal*," 42.

[39]Aqsa Abdul Muqeet Khan, "Love, Peace and Toleration: with Special Reference to Jalal-ud-din Rumi," M. Phil. Dissertation (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 2015).

[40]Eric J. Roberts, "Plato's View of the Soul," 371–89.

[41]Arberry, *Sufism*: *An Account of the Mystics of Islam.*

[42]A. Sadat Mir Mohammadi, "A Study on the Role of Sama in Literary-Mystical Texts," *Journal of Fundamental and Applied Sciences* 9 (1S), (2017): 366. https://doi.org/10.4314/jfas.v9i1s.697.

[43]A. Sadat Mir Mohammadi, "A Study on the Role of Sama in Literary-Mystical Texts," 366.

[44]Plato, *The Republic*, trans., Benjamin Jowett (2013), 449a-472a.

[45]Christopher Shields, 2014. "Plato's Divided Soul," 15–38.

[46]A. S. Ferguson, "Plato's Simile of Light. Part I. The Similes of the Sun and the Line," *The Classical Quarterly* 15 (3-4) (1921): 131–52. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0009838800000604.

[47]Titus Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufism* (Thorsons, 1995).

[48]Christopher Shields, 2014. "Plato's Divided Soul," 15–38.

other hand, once a Sufi reaches above the level of states, they then enter in the state of *Baqa* (perseverance in God).[49] It is then that he returns to the world from his ecstatic state completely transformed. Being reborn he then educates others to let them experience the same ecstasy so that a chain could form a communion with God.[50]

Among the first ascetics of Islam Negation of self, living in poverty (*faqir*), fasting, and concentration within oneself (*Batin*) were the major steps to form a communion with God.[51] Likewise, in the *Republic*, Plato prohibited the seeker of the Good (guardian) to stall for greed and wealth. So that he would never reflect on material gains.[52]

According to Plato soul is immortal because it is God like and practicing virtues are preparation for an afterlife.

> In defense of his believe in the immortality of the soul, Plato argues for the dualistic doctrine; body and soul are too different things , and the soul is immaterial, imperceptible, and immortal, while the body is material, perceptible, and mortal. The soul knows the Forms without the senses, and, like the Forms it is imperceptible and indestructible; it survives any and all of the bodies that ever belong to it. These arguments for immortality are intended to support the philosopher's way of life…hence the philosophers practice of virtues is to be understood as preparation for death, when he will be free of the distraction that result from association with the body.[53]

Likewise, Muslims have faith in immortality of the soul. According to Qur'ānic verse, "It is Allah ˹Who˺ calls back the souls ˹of people˺ upon their death as well as ˹the souls˺ of the living during their sleep. Then He keeps those for whom He has ordained death, and releases the others until ˹their˺ appointed time. Surely in this are signs for people who reflect."[54]

Henceforth, Sufi's endeavor to annihilate their carnal urge is a way to prepare them for the reunion with the God in their purified self. But in Sufism this endeavor does not hold a greed for reward or fear of punishment in an after-life.[55] They practice it to create a friendship with God because (higher ecstatic state of love) *Ishq* is only attainable when a Sufi is god-loving person rather than a god-fearing person.[56]

3. Concept of Love in Plato and Sufism

In *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* Plato introduced his theory of '*Eros*' (love). Love is often considered as the two halves of the same soul.[57] In Symposium, love is used as a ladder to ascend a direct cognitive contact with the Forms. In Phaedrus, love is revealed as a highest divine madness through which knowledge of Intelligible realm is possible.[58] However, in Muslim mysticism love

[49]Reza Shah-Kazemi, "The Notion and Significance of *Ma'rifa* in Sufism," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 13 (2), (2002): 155–81. https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/13.2.155.

[50]Shah-Kazemi, "The Notion and Significance of *Ma'rifa* in Sufism," 155–81. https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/13.2.155.

[51]Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufism*.

[52]Plato, *Republic*, 2013; and Bernard Williams, "The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's Republic," In *Essays on Plato's Psychology*, edited by Ellen Wagner (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 157-168.

[53]Irwin, *Classical Philosophy,* 212.

[54]az-Zumar 39:42.

[55]Arberry, *Sufism*: *An Account of the Mystics of Islam.*

[56]David Glidden, and A. W. Price, "Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle," *Noûs* 27 (1), (1993): 109. https://doi.org/10.2307/2215907; and Aqsa Abdul Muqeet Khan, "Love, Peace and Toleration: with Special Reference to Jalal-ud-din Rumi."

[57]Plato, *Symposium*; D. D. W.H. Thompson, *The Phaedrus of Plato* (London: Whitaker & Co., 1968).

[58]W.H. Thompson, *The Phaedrus of Plato.*

has deeper meaning; so they used the term '*Ishq*,' i.e. often explained as 'divine love' or extreme love. Ishq is divided into three three complex and vital sub-categories in Sufi tradition. They are: *ishq-e-Haqeeqi*, *ishq-e-Rasool* and *ishq-e-Majazi*. *Ishq-e-Majazi* could lead human to the highest level of *ishq-e-Haqiqi.*[59]

The Unity of Being (*wahadat-ul-Wajud*) as described by Ibn-al-Arabi is a form of hierarchy of divine beings that is akin to platonic hierarchy where the Good emanates the forms from which all existence came into being.[60] Moreover, Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi developed a theosophical system who termed it as Illumination.[61] His concept remarks the same concept mentioned in Qur'ān:[62]

> Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a *lustrous* niche, wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a glittering star. It is lit from a blessed tree — an olive — neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would well-nigh glow forth even though fire touched it not. Light upon light! Allah guides to His light whomsoever He will. And Allah sets forth parables to men, and Allah knows all things full well.[63]

In similar vein, Suharwardi taught that everything began with the Absolute light and every other light is a reflection of that light to its lesser extent.[64] As the Holy Qur'ān proclaims, "He it is Who made the sun *radiate* a brilliant light and the moon *reflect* a luster, and ordained for it stages, that you might know the number of years and the reckoning *of time.* Allah has not created this but in truth. He details the Signs for a people who have knowledge."[65]

This is also similar to Plato's Simile of the Sun where he relates sun with the Good.[66] The sun, according to him, is considered to be a central source of energy. It enables us to see the visible realm as well as cause for the existence in the visible realm like changing seasons, the demarcation between day and night etc.[67]

Plato realized that love has coercing energies, so they could not be wasted in fulfilling mere sexual pursuits and other sorts of erotic expressions.[68] The knowledge of Forms is only possible if we properly channel our power of love. Whereas, in Sufi tradition love is considered free of

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[59]The view that an *ishq-e-majaz*i lead to *ishq-e-haqeeqi* is yet controversial as few mystics believe in it but some does not. See (Aqsa Abdul Muqeet Khan, "Love, Peace and Toleration: with Special Reference to Jalal-ud-din Rumi."]

[60]Diwan Taskheer Khan, "A Critical Exposition of Ibn Arabi's Doctine of Wahdat ul Wajood," *International Journal of Contemporary Research in Humanities and Social Sciences* 6, no. 2 (2017): 11-21.

[61]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Spread of the Illuminationist School of Suhrawardi," *Studies in Comparative Religion* 6, no. 3 (1972): 1-14 http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com/uploads/ArticlePDFs/201.pdf

[62]Light is the most significant term which is prominent in Qur'ān as the way to wisdom. The relevant verses are included in: al-Nisa 4:175; al- Maida 5:16,17,45,47; al An`am 06:78,79,92,123; al Ar`af 7: 158, 190; al-Taubah 9:32,41,64; al-Yunas 10:6,68; al-Yusaf 12:19, 52; al-Ra`d 13:17; Ibrahim 14:2,6; al-Nahl 16:81,86; al-Anbiya 21:49; al-Nur 24:16, 36, 37,41; al-Naml 27:26; al- Furqan 25:62; al-Qasas 28:72; al-Rūm 30:61; al-Ahzab 33:37, 38; al-Hadid 57:10, 13, 14, 20, 29; al-Saff 61:9; al-Taghabun 64:9; al- Talaq 65:12; al-Tahrim 66:9; al-Fatir 35:21; al-Zumar 39: 23,70.

[63]al-Nur 24:36.

[64]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Spread of the Illuminationist School of Suhrawardi," 1-14.

[65]al-Yunas 10:6.

[66]N. R. Murphy, "The 'Simile of Light' in Plato's Republic," *The Classical Quarterly* 26 (2), (1932): 93–102. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0009838800002366.

[67]Plato, *The Republic*, Book Vi 502d-end.

[68]David Glidden, and A. W. Price, "Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle," *Noûs* 27 (1), (1993): 109. https://doi.org/10.2307/2215907.

carnal urges; and it should not be correlate with passion rather it should always be understood in the context of spirituality.

Erotic love, as mentioned in Plato's *Symposium*, directs us towards knowledge via several procedures. First we are attracted towards a physical body. The lover should forbid sexual pursuits in order to improve the soul of the beloved. It is only then we could learn to love humanity, traditions and institutions.[69] At last our love is directed towards one Supreme Reality itself. Once we have reached here our journey is complete. Thus '*Eros*' or '*Ishq*' is a bridge between visible and intelligible realm; it is the motivation for both philosophical and religious quest.[70]

3.1. Comparative Analysis of Plato's *Eros* and Sufi's *Ishq*

For a more vivid picture let's assemble these parallel notions of love in the following table for better

Table 2. Comparative Study of the Concept of Love in Platoism and Islamic mysticism

Aspect	Plato's *Eros*	Sufi's *Ishq*
Source of Love	Eros arises from lack of perfection and incompletness within an individual. This is completed through the Ultimate Idea.[71]	Ishq is a divine gift that originates from soul and the love of God *(al-wadud)*. *Ishq* paves a way for soul to reconnect with its origin, i.e. God.[72]
Goal of Love	To attain eternal perfection in the world of Ideas (non-material reality) through contemplation of the Form of Beauty[73]	Union with the God through spiritual purification
Means to achieve goal	Philosophical and rational contemplation. The language used to express *eros* is philosophical and metaphysical in nature.[74]	Spiritial practices like *zikr*, *muraqaba* (meditation), service and love of the prophet (PBUH) and Allah.[75] The language used to express *ishq* or mystical love is intense, poetic and symbolic in

[69]Plato, *Symposium.*

[70]Richard Kraut, "Plato on Love," *Oxford Handbooks Online* (Oxford University Press, 2008) https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195182903.003.0012; Aqsa Abdul Muqeet Khan, "Love, Peace and Toleration: with Special Reference to Jalal-ud-din Rumi."]

[71]Plato, *Plato*, Trans., C. J. Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Harvard University Press, 2013).

[72]Bambang Suharto, "The Concept of Love and the Basis of Its Doctrines between *Maqamat* and *Haal*, 42.

[73]Richard Kraut, *Plato on Love*.

[74]J. C. van Winden, and Catherine Osborne, "Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love," *Vigiliae Christianae* 49 (3), (1995): 301. https://doi.org/10.2307/1584204.

[75]Arberry, *Sufism*: *An Account of the Mystics of Islam.*

Aspect	Plato's *Eros*	Sufi's *Ishq*
Concept of the Beauty and Beloved	the Form of Beauty is an abstract perfection and a bridge to ultimate truth or reality[77]	nature. One can witness it in the works of Maulana Jalal-ud-din Rumi[76], Ibn Arabi, Hafiz etc. *Ishq-e mijaazi* (earthly love) is the mirror of divine love; whereas *ishq-e-haqeeqi* is the eternal love for Allah (*al-Haq*[78])
Purpose of the Soul	The *psyche* (soul) remembers the Forms and continuously struggles to return to the world of Ideas (Divine Realm)	*Ruh* (soul) is divine in its spirit and nature. It gets corrupted by the material world. The lover must purify it to reunite with his Origion, i.e. Allah.
Theological Foundation	Rooted in Idealism and rationalism. Hence Plato's path is intellectual and philosophical.	Rooted in *Tawhid* (Oneness of Allah). Also love of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is a central concept in Sufism. Loving Prophet is akin to loving Allah. Consequently, theological mysticism is ritualistic and experiential in nature.
Mind verses Heart	Plato emphasized that one can contemplate through reason and wisdom	Whereas, in Sufism, emotional surrender is important for self contemplation. These includes mystical experiences through tears and longing of the beloved.

Table 2 also depicts some key similarities between the two parallel concepts. For both Plato's *Eros* and Islamic mysticism's *ishq*, soul is the ascent or medium to connect with the Supreme Power or God. Since, soul can transcends from the physical world to the spiritual world, it can urge the body to seek the Ultimate truth (in Platonic Version)[79] or can attain nearness of Allah (in

[76]Aqsa Abdul Muqeet Khan, "Love, Peace and Toleration: with Special Reference to Jalal-ud-din Rumi." 2015); Shadab Khan, "The Alchemy of Love: Transforming Human Longing into Divine Union in Rumi's Tale of 'the King and the Handmaiden,'" *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research* 13 (11), (2024): 105-111, http://ijmer.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/volume13/volume13-issue11(1)/18.pdf.

[77]Winden, and Catherine Osborne, "Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love," 301. https://doi.org/10.2307/1584204.

[78]Shadab Khan, "The Alchemy of Love: Transforming Human Longing into Divine Union in Rumi's Tale of 'the King and the Handmaiden,'" 105-111.

[79]Winden, and Catherine Osborne, "Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love," 301.

Sufism).[80] Both parallels believes in physoical love as a starting point to ascend soul towards a higher reality. Likewise, both visualize worldly beauty (be it in the form of soul or nature) as a reflection or sign of Higher Reality. Moreover, both perceives that love is a transformative force that enables the soul to be purified from worldly imperfections; it then turns to intellectual or spiritual enlightenment.

4. Conclusion

Critiques on Sufism, often accuse that Muslim mysticism is highly influenced by Platonic approach.[81] The point to be identified here is not the common influences shared by Plato and Muslim mystics. But rather a common urge to reform soul; and understanding love to the extent for which it was meant to be. It was this approach that derives Homer, Pre-Socratic philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, Averroes, Avicenna, Rumi and various others who have followed this path; and believed in a Higher Reality (the One) which human beings cannot comprehend, but could feel within, since the beginning of time.[82]

Although Muslim mystic text has been comprised of poetry, art and novels; while Plato was much critical of art and poetry calling it 'art as amusement' that holds negative impact on the youth.[83] Yet it could be affirmed that both text, whether Plato's dialogues and *Republic* or mystical text of Muslims, were enriched in literature and identity. It is vividly evident that both played a vital role in educating the masses and in directing their lives through spirituality. As far as mystic poetry and literature is concerned, their vivid spiritual impacts have itself endowed its wisdom. Thus making the claim to Platonic amusement art into dust much before philosophers, artists and anthropologists could have depicted it.[84]

For numerous rationalists, Mysticism often seemed irrational, ambiguous and complex. We may call it a 'No man's land'. But by collaborating it with Plato's idealism, I've tried my best to maintain that even through a rational procedure we can prove that the élan vital[85] of our existence is soul. It is where a man's knowledge begins and it is where it ends. While the concept of love and soul in Platonic and Sufism approach from different perspectives, i.e., philosophical rationalism verses theological mysticism; yet both reach the conclusion that love beholds a sacred power that can transform and purify self. Furthermore, Platonic love leads to eternal truths via contemplation of world of Forms; whereas, in Sufism love is the essence that leads to union with Allah. It is a path where the lover surrenders themselves completely to their beloved.

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[82]See Jaap Mansfeld, "Plato, Pythagoras, Aristotle, the Peripatetics, the Stoics, and Thales and His Followers 'on Causes,'" In A. Brancacci (Ed.), *Antichi e Moderni nella Filosofia d'Eta Imperiale (Elenchos 34) (Bibliopolis, 2002),* 17-68; and Arberry, *Sufism*: *An Account of the Mystics of Islam.*

[83]Robin George Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford University Press, 1958).

[84]See Collingwood theories of art and craft where he endorses that Platonic amusement art are a craft it doesn't include art that have spiritual aesthetic sense. [Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*]

[85]The vital force or life force is hypothesized by Henri Bergson as an efficient cause and the source of evolution in nature.

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